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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 001523

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TAMILCHELVAN'S DEATH - AFTERMATH AND REACTIONS

REF: COLOMBO 1509

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. Reasons: 1.4(b, d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: LTTE Police Chief Nadesan has replaced the deceased Tamilchelvan as head of the LTTE political wing, but will continue to serve as head of the LTTE "police." A former Sri Lankan government peace negotiator noted that Nadesan has little experience in the negotiating field. A Norwegian Embassy political officer who knows Nadesan personally said he was thoughtful and less ideological than his predecessor. Still, he expected LTTE military and intelligence leaders to keep Nadesan on a short leash. Government officials and Sinhalese nationalists celebrated Tamilchelvan's demise. Although the government apparently did not specifically target Tamilchelvan, the killing of a senior LTTE leader may boost the government's prospects for obtaining nationalist support for its budget. The main opposition UNP, believing Tamilchelvan organized the forced Tamil poll boycott in the North and East, said it would not miss him. Most Tamils in government-controlled areas mourned his death as a severe blow to the prospects for peace. However, the Government Agent in the LTTE-controlled district Mullaitivu held Tamilchelvan responsible for child recruitment, telling us that there was little regret about his death among ordinary people in the Tiger-controlled Vanni. End summary.

NEW HEAD OF LTTE POL WING: POLICE CHIEF NADESAN

12. (U) On November 2, within hours of the death of LTTE Political Wing Chief Tamilchelvan in an aerial attack on an LTTE camp near Kilinochchi (reftel), the LTTE announced his replacement. LTTE police chief Nadesan will exercise both the police and political head functions in the future.

13. (C) Tourism Minister Milinda Moragoda, a former Sri Lankan government peace negotiator under the Ranil Wickremesinghe government, told Ambassador on November 1 that Nadesan did not have significant experience in peace talks. The three principal LTTE negotiators in 2002-3, Moragoda pointed out, were Balasingham, Tamilchelvan and Karuna -- all of whom are now either dead or under arrest. Nadesan was not a member of the 2002-3 negotiating team, but was on the LTTE negotiating team that met with the Rajapaksa team led by Health Minister de Silva in two rounds in Geneva in 2006. However, Tamilchelvan did almost all the talking, so Nadesan remains an unknown quantity, Moragoda observed. Foreign Minister Bogollagama told Ambassador on November 7 that current Inspector General of Police Victor Perera, a member of the GSL's most recent Geneva delegation, recognized Nadesan when they met at a negotiating session. It seems that Nadesan once served as a young police constable under Perera. Bogollagama questioned whether Nadesan was to be taken seriously as political wing head, observing that "what the LTTE needs is a communicator."

14. (C) At a meeting of the Co-Chairs Heads of Mission on November 6, the Japanese and EU Ambassadors agreed that Prabhakaran has sent a signal with his selection of the relatively inexperienced Nadesan that he wants to pull back from the international community. However, the Norwegian Embassy's Political Chief, who has accompanied his Ambassador

and senior Norwegian facilitators on many trips to Kilinochchi and observed the peace talks in Geneva, had a more positive assessment of Nadesan's qualifications. He noted that Nadesan is married to a Sinhalese and, unlike his predecessor, speaks Sinhala and English fluently, which should prove a great asset in any future negotiations. He said he knows Nadesan well and has been impressed with his intellectual capacity and ideological flexibility. He found Nadesan to be thoughtful and a more independent thinker than

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Tamilchelvan. However, he believed that now that Nadesan has become the political wing head, LTTE supremo Prabhakaran and intelligence wing chief Pottu Amman will probably keep him on a shorter leash.

GOVERNMENT CROWS OVER TAMILCHELVAN'S DEMISE

15. (U) Following Friday's attack, Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa stated publicly that the military has information about the locations of all LTTE leaders and vowed the GSL would go after them one by one. Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremenayake, introducing a resolution in Parliament to extend the emergency regulations, said on November 6 that the military cannot tie its hands and wait for the LTTE to attack. He added that security forces have no choice but to retaliate against the LTTE through missions such as the one that killed the LTTE political head, which he called a great victory for security forces. He asserted that Tamilchelvan was responsible for many murders in the country.

16. (U) The government defense spokesman, Foreign Employment Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, said Tamilchelvan was not a peace negotiator, but a ruthless terrorist. He claimed that Tamilchelvan participated in peace negotiations only to satisfy the international community and was in fact a stumbling block to a peaceful solution. Rambukwella alleged that each time Tamilchelvan went overseas for peace talks (note: he apparently visited 17 countries), he raised funds for the LTTE, and was also involved in arms procurement. Rambukwella added that the GSL hoped Tamilchelvan's killing would help win JVP support for the government's budget presentation beginning November 7.

TAMILCHELVAN NOT SPECIFICALLY TARGETED

17. (C) However, to the best of our information, Tamilchelvan was not personally targeted in this attack. Rambukwella confirmed publicly what military spokesman Nanayakkara told us the day of the event: that the GSL had intelligence that a senior LTTE member was at the location and therefore decided to bomb it. They did not know that the senior LTTE leader present was Tamilchelvan.

18. (C) UN resident coordinator Neil Buhne informed Pol Chief on November 3 that his organization had concluded that Tamilchelvan had not personally been the object of the attack. The Norwegian Embassy told us it had also formed the same conclusion and prepared statements for its senior facilitators Erik Solheim and Jon Hanssen-Bauer based on that assumption. However, the Norwegian Pol Chief noted ironically that the point was perhaps moot, since he doubted that the Air Force would have refrained from bombing the targeted bunker had it known Tamilchelvan was inside.

REACTIONS TO TAMILCHELVAN'S DEATH

19. (U) The chauvinist, Buddhist monk-based JHU said that the elimination of LTTE leader Tamilchelvan had proceeded in accordance with the laws of natural justice. In a press briefing, the left-wing, Sinhalese nationalist JVP made its exuberance over Tamilchelvan's demise clear, calling it a victory for the nation and urging the government to continue the war against the LTTE. JVP third-in-command Wijitha Herath told Pol FSN that in fact his party now planned to vote with the government during the forthcoming budget debate, with the justification that the war against the LTTE had priority over other issues like government corruption or the cost of living.

110. (C) The main opposition United National Party (UNP),

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somewhat surprisingly, did not condemn the killing of the LTTE's peace negotiator. Former Member of Parliament and current UNP national organizer S.B. Dissanayake, when we contacted him, said that Tamilchelvan's death was a morale boost for the security forces. He claimed that Tamilchelvan was instrumental in arranging the LTTE-enforced boycott of the 2005 presidential election in the north and east that resulted in Mahinda Rajapaksa's victory over UNP candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe. Dissanayake said that his party would therefore not regret Tamilchelvan's death.

TAMILS GENERALLY MOURN TAMILCHELVAN

¶11. (C) Jaffna Government Agent Mr. K. Ganesh told Pol FSN, "People feel an inner anger, though they cannot outwardly express their views. The feeling is there will be heavy retaliation, which can be a surprise act. North and East is the same where the plight of the civilians is concerned, who bear the brunt of this exchange of warfare. We cannot always be giving up lives." Member of Parliament and human rights activist Mano Ganesan of the Western People's Front said, "He was the Political Head of the LTTE and killing him is virtually an attack on a political solution."

¶12. (C) R. Yogarajan of the Ceylon Worker's Congress, a Deputy Minister in the current government said, "We have sent a condolence message. All the Tamil people feel sympathy. The Sinhalese people seem to be happy about it. We have sympathy because we consider him a political leader of the Tamil people and he has been an activist of the peace process. It is unfortunate the government did this because the location of the Peace Secretariat was not hidden from the security forces and the LTTE believed they would not be targeted and moved about freely. The government has taken advantage of this and we feel this is not fair. It is a counter to the Anuradhapura debacle."

¶13. (U) During the debate over extension of the emergency regulations, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem (also Minister of Posts and Telecommunications) offered his party's condolences to the LTTE. Hakeem noted he had met Tamilchelvan in several rounds of peace talks. He urged all communities, Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim, to try to live in amity as one nation.

TAMILCHELVAN RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILD RECRUITMENT?

¶14. (U) These views were not unanimous, however. Tamil United Liberation Front leader Anandasangaree, whose party is not represented in Parliament but currently supports the government, said that the LTTE had "invited this destruction" by not taking the peace process seriously; "his outfit has taken the Tamils and the whole world for a ride and ultimately deceived everybody. What I could say is by playing hide and seek Tamilchelvan dug his own grave."

¶15. (C) Government Agent Ms. Imelda Sukumar of Mullaitivu noted, "Tamilchelvan was responsible for the recruitment of children in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi. People in those areas feel a lot of anger because of this. He was sidelined by the LTTE hierarchy for about six months because of the issue of child recruitment. There is not much mourning by the civilians in those areas."

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Reactions to Tamilchelvan's death fell fairly predictably along Sri Lanka's ethnic and political divides. We do not share the assessment that his death represents a great victory, since his value as a military target was negligible. However, it is not surprising that the government would seek to leverage the propaganda win to help itself out of a jam on the budget vote -- and that

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strategy may well succeed. After the demise of chief LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham in December 2006 and Tamilchelvan's killing, we consider it likely that LTTE hardliners will become even more dominant. Nadesan's relative inexperience in politics and as a negotiator may signify that LTTE military leader Prabhakaran and his intelligence head Pottu Amman intend to exert greater influence over a weakened political wing. Nevertheless, the assets Nadesan brings to the job, including his linguistic accomplishments, could prove useful in future negotiations.
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